

US Envoy Hopeful Of Kashmir Peace

Daily Telegraph 09/05/2003

By Ahmed Rashid/ Islamabad

The US Deputy Secretary of State said last night that he was guardedly optimistic the hostility between India and Pakistan was easing after he completed the first leg of [his peace mission to the old rivals](#).

Richard Armitage said in Islamabad that he had "confidence in both countries to advance all issues through dialogue". However, he warned that "serious confidence-building measures have to be done" by both sides after so many years of tension and conflict. "It is not the position of the US to pressure either India or Pakistan but to bring about a dialogue - that would be a good thing," he said after meeting Pakistani leaders and spending 90 minutes with President Pervaiz Musharraf.



President Pervaiz Musharraf greets Richard Armitage in Islamabad

However an upsurge of violence in Indian Kashmir marred his visit, with at least 20 people killed on Wednesday and another five dying early yesterday. Mr Armitage declined to say that Pakistan had ended the infiltration of militants into Kashmir, but added that "the infiltration is down from this time last year". He added: "I have been assured there is no infiltration now and no camps in [Pakistani] Kashmir and if there were, they should all be gone by tomorrow."

India accuses Pakistan of arming and funding Kashmiri and Pakistani militants who are fighting Indian security forces in Kashmir.

In June 2001 Mr Musharraf gave a pledge to Mr Armitage that infiltration would end but neither the US nor Britain is convinced that it has stopped. Militant Kashmiri and Pakistani groups are continuing to recruit fighters for the "jihad" in Kashmir and their leaders have denounced any concessions to India.

As Pakistan chairs the UN Security Council during this month, Mr Armitage said he had also discussed with its leaders how to get a new UN resolution on Iraq after the food-for-oil programme ends.

Another issue raised was the allegation that elements in Pakistan are giving support to Afghanistan's Taliban, who have intensified their attacks on US and Afghan government forces based there. Mr Armitage will travel to Kabul today and goes to New Delhi tomorrow. His visit coincides with a major breakthrough in relations between Pakistan and India. In a surprise move last week, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee ended nearly two years of hostility by announcing he would enter into negotiations with Pakistan.

On Tuesday the Pakistani Prime Minister, Zafrullah Khan Jamali, [made a series of proposals to India](#), including the restoration of travel links, return of all diplomats to each other's country, release of detained Indian fishermen and implementation of trade concessions.